



Florida women among World War II pilots to be honored today

By KIMBERLY HEFLING / The Associated Press

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WASHINGTON — The first women to fly U.S. military planes will be awarded a Congressional Gold Medal on Capitol Hill.

More than 1,000 women flew aircraft during World War II. They were known as Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASP. Their primary mission was to fly noncombat missions in the United States.

Thirty-eight of them were killed in service. But they were long considered civilians, not members of the military, until 1977 when they were afforded veteran status.

It's estimated that about 300 of the women are still alive, including Anna Monkiewicz of Crestview. She is one of as many as 26 survivors living in Florida, according to U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson's office.

About 200 of the survivors are expected to attend the ceremony Wednesday at 10 a.m. CST.

The medal is the highest award Congress gives to honor civilians for achievements and contributions to society.